MISTRESS DOROTHY

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MISTRESS DOROTHY

BY

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ILLUSTRATED BY SARAH NOBLE-IVES

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MISTRESS DOROTHY

CHAPTER I

THE STORY OF THE GREEN SQUIRREL

HAPPENED that as I was riding by Squire Winthrop's, meditating upon the beauty of the summer day, and so on God's goodness, Mistress Dorothy (the fairest of all the children in the colonies to my thinking) saw me and bade me dis-

mount. Gossiping hussies said that I rode by Squire Winthrop's more often than was needful, but they knew not of what they talked. Mayhap I did pass the house every fine afternoon, but the reason was, that being hard at work upon the law with Judge Snow, I found that if I saddled my mare and went out for a quiet ride, after having wrestled all day with some knotty problem in Blackstone, my muddled brain became once more clear. Therefore, I liked it little when these hussies with winks and such signs asked me how I made it with the law and hinted that it was rather the law of love than the love of law that brought me by Squire Winthrop's.

However, nothing loath, or in very truth, daring not disobey Mistress Dorothy's command, I did hitch Bess, my mare, at the gate, and approaching the golden-

haired lass running to meet me, desired to know her ladyship's will.

Quoth she with a pretty curtsy:

"Tell me, 'tory, Bwuver Ben."

I know not why she called me "Bwuver Ben." 'T was nothing, I suppose, but one of her pretty ways, yet when her sister Elizabeth was by, it made me turn a pretty color.

"Oho!" said I, seating myself beneath the large elm tree beside the house,— "Oho! And that was what my little sunbeam wanted." I was wont to call her Sunbeam and such like names.

"And what, pray, shall it be about? Shall I tell thee concerning Mistress Prig, who did pray nightly and,— "

"No! No! Bwuver Ben!" she said, stamping her little foot and growing angry. But then in a second, and before I had time to chide her, she slid her little arms

around my neck, and kissing me the while, murmured: "Pwease, no, Bwuver Ben. Thou knowest I love not Mistwess Pwig."

I kissed the golden hair and she, knowing she had been forgiven her unladylike (but I fear not unwomanlike) conduct, seated herself in my lap, and looking up at me with those wonderful brown eyes of hers (they were very like Elizabeth's) said with a smile fading into a look of perplexity, "Let it be — let it be about a squirrel"; and she settled back into my arms.

I fear much that Elder Hardnaught liked little the yarns I was wont to spin to Dorothy, saying they did savor of witchcraft and like ungodly things. Yet I saw not the harm in them. Moreover, she did always go to sleep before I had done. So true was this that when she was ill and could not sleep, I— but I will tell that later.

I looked about to see if Elizabeth were nigh, and not seeing her and so having courage, I began.

"In the olden times there did live a small black squirrel —"

"Bwack?" queried Dorothy, doubtfully.

"Green," quoth I.

She pouted up her lips in a pretty way she had when she would think, and then snuggling back as though all were settled, said: "Yeth. I fink gween. Go on, Bwuver Ben."

I did begin once more, but before I had done with that squirrel he must needs have a red tail, yellow feet, and purple eyes. Alas! I knew it wrongful, but she was a wilful maid.

At length with all things settled, I began.

"In the olden times there once did live

a green squirrel, with a red tail, and with yellow feet, and purple eyes. He — "

"How bwig?" quoth Mistress Dorothy.

I dutifully measured upon my finger how big I conceived him to be.

"Go on," she commanded.

And so I told her how this squirrel did live on the top of a high mountain, and she disputed it not; so I knew that I could now have my own way. Perhaps my thoughts drifted from my story, I know not, but this is the substance of what I said.

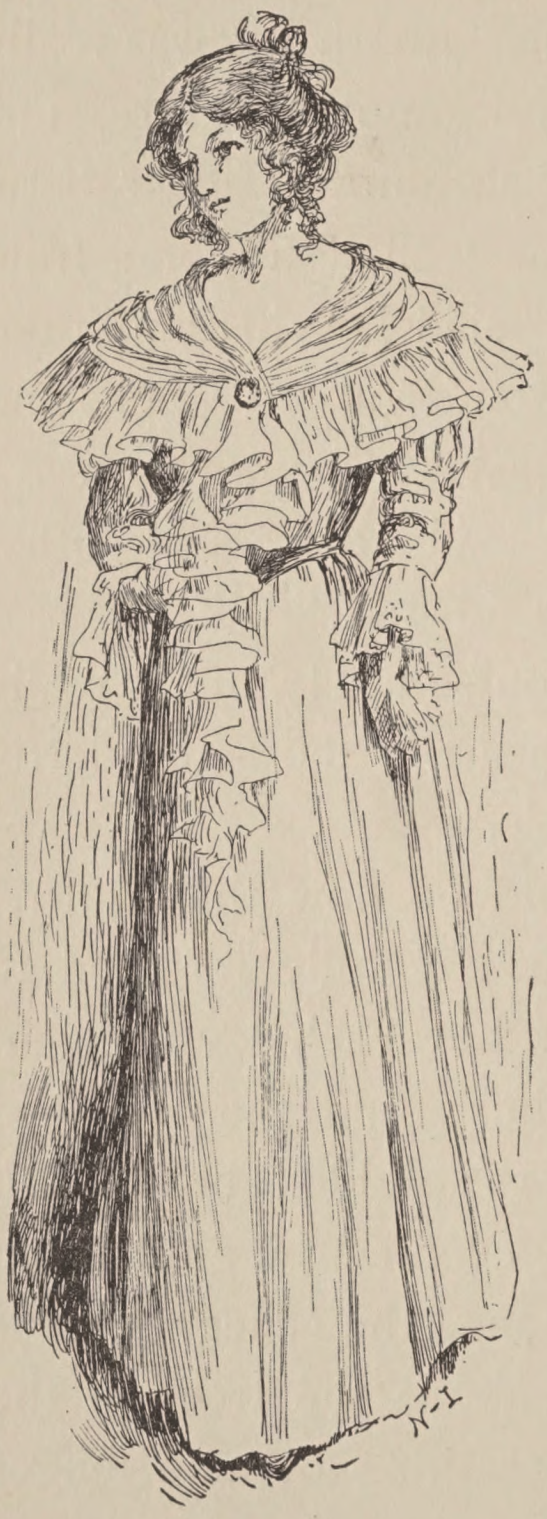
One day while strolling down the mountain side he came upon a green meadow and saw in the middle thereof a monstrous apple tree, and upon the apple tree the finest apple he had ever clapt his purple eyes upon. Immediately he was seized with a mighty desire for this apple, but dared not climb the tree.

"And this apple," quoth I, "was really a most wonderful apple."—Here, methought, I caught a glimpse of Elizabeth, and my story was well-nigh gone from my head.—"For," said I, "this apple did have, first, most wonderful red cheeks and then the very brightest of brown eyes—"

"Bwown eyes," said Mistress Dorothy.

"No! No!" said I. "What was I about? No, of course not! But it really was, little sweetheart, a most wonderful and beautiful apple."

And then I told of how the squirrel would come each day fully resolved to climb the tree, but how each day his courage would fail him. And then I talked on and on until the golden head sank against my breast, even as the golden sun was sinking among the fleecy clouds which hung just above the trees in the distance. The breathing became longer



and slower and more even, and so I brought my story to a close.

"The leaves," said I, "turned all red and gold and brown, and still each day the little green squirrel came and waited beneath the tree. And he waited, and waited, and waited."

I listened, and the gentle breath seemed to hesitate for a moment.

"And waited, and waited, and w–a–i–t–e–d —"

Sitting there in the warm silent breeze, I thought of a story of my own and then blushed at my boldness as Elizabeth stepped out of the twilight and kissed the child sleeping so peacefully in my arms.

CHAPTER II

THE STORY OF THE GOLDEN BUMBLEBEE

HAPPENED I was passing Mistress Dorothy's, and she, seeing me through the window, bade me halt. I obeyed, and, sitting there on the back of Bess, watched the dainty lass as she tripped across the green before the house and came to me.

"Tum down, Bwuver Ben, so 's I can kiss you," said Dorothy.

Zounds! I would have forded our own

Black River in the springtime at that invitation. After I had held the pretty head to my breast, and given her a ride upon the back of Bess (it was good to see how carefully the mare did step when she knew Dorothy was upon her back), I was about to mount and off when I heard my little peach blossom say:

"Will not tell me 'tory, Bwuver Ben?"

Of course she knew I would tell her a story, but I, liking to watch her tease, made as though to mount.

"Youse not nice, Bwuver Ben," quoth the maid, and looking around I could see just the littlest crystal tear

grow and grow until finally gathering strength it trickled down the rosy cheek.

The sight pained me sorely, and so kissing it away, and another that was quickly following, I led her to our favorite place beneath the elm, and the rosy face was once more bright.

"Didst think I was going, Honeybloom?" said I.

And the rogue, holding her head a little to one side and looking up at me with a smile, answered, "No, Bwuver Ben, not if I cwied!"

And I, throwing back my head, laughed right heartily.

"Thou 'rt worse than Elizabeth," I said, and looked about to make sure she was not near. "But what sort of a story wouldst thou have this afternoon? About a bumblebee?" said I, as a big fellow darted before us and into the hedge behind.

"Yeth," said Dorothy, settling herself very comfortably. "About a bumblebee."

"Once there lived," I began, looking up into the blue sky, "a green bumblebee."

"Gween?" queried the maid.

I knew she would permit me not to choose the color, but I must needs call it something.

"Gween? No, I fink — I fink gold. Oncet there lived a gold bumblebee."

"Once there lived," I went on dutifully, "a golden bumblebee,— so big."

I showed on my thumb how big, and Dorothy nodded approvingly.

"And he lived in the land of Flowers. All day long he would fly around, buzz, buz-z-, looking for the sweetest and fairest of flowers for his honey. He would dart in and out among the buttercups and daisies in the rich green fields, and then would steal softly down among the little

blue violets beside the brook, and anon would swiftly flash through the bright sunshine away up the mountain side to where he knew was hidden among the rocks a wild mountain rose. And when the night came he would close his golden eyes and sleep soundly until the morn. I suppose he was as happy as any bumblebee who ever buzzed,— until he met the big red rose. One day the sky was so very blue and the bumblebee feeling so very fine that he thought he would journey farther than was his wont. So, starting early, he did go over the top of the mountain and down the other side, to where he saw a little white house and before it a very beautiful garden. From one flower to another did he dart, until, fairly tired, he thought it good time to return. Then, alas! He saw through a window the big red rose."

Here I thought I did catch a glimpse of Elizabeth through the window.

"Never so long as he had lived had he ever seen such a rose as was this. He had never seen a rose so tall and stately; he had never seen a rose with such dark red cheeks, or such w o n d e r f u l brown eyes —"

"Bwown eyes?" said Dorothy, dreamily. She was but barely awake, and glad I was that she did not notice the color as it flew to my cheeks. (Elizabeth has brown eyes.)

I know not where my wits have gone of late.

"No, Dorothy," I hastily replied, "of course not. Brown stem, little sweetheart,—a most wonderful brown stem."

But I had lost interest in my yarn and was for sitting there silently in the warm breeze and for listening to the songs of the summer birds, and thinking of —

"Go on," commanded Dorothy, half asleep.

I began, though slowly and half to myself.

"This rose was so wondrous handsome, little Golden-Hair, that Mr. Bumblebee dared not venture farther than the place where he had stood when first he saw it; but every single day would he come there, and, lying hid in the heart of a big poppy growing nearby, would watch it and watch it.

"'Some day,' he said, 'I will enter the house and go to it.' But he did not; he dared not."

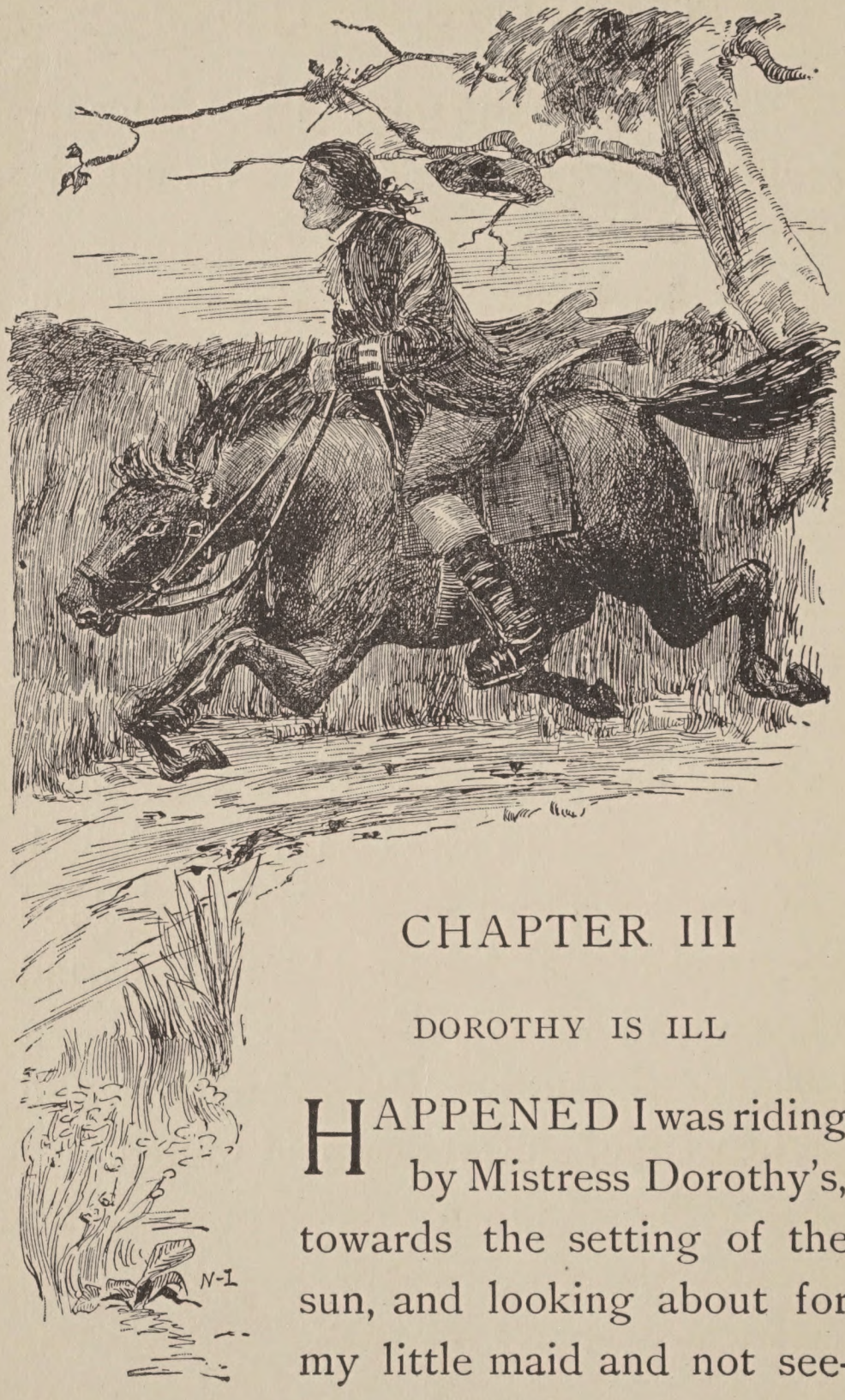
The head had slowly sunk lower and lower.

"And so he waited, and waited, and w–a–i–t–e–d —"

My Dorothy was fast asleep.

A robin on a nearby tree sang a few notes, and then as though suddenly aware of how late the hour, darted off to his nest. I dreamily watched the twig upon which he had perched as it waved back and forth. The sun slowly sank behind the trees and all the world was silent and at peace, save I myself.

"No," I muttered, "he dared not, and so he waited, and waited, and waited."



CHAPTER III

DOROTHY IS ILL

HAPPENED I was riding by Mistress Dorothy's, towards the setting of the sun, and looking about for my little maid and not see-

ing her I was troubled, for she was always waiting for me at this time of the day. Hastily dismounting I left Bess at the gate and hurried towards the house, where I was met by Mistress Winthrop, whose cheeks, ordinarily so rosy, were as white as the snow. My knees did shake as she said hastily: "Dorothy is very ill. I fear she is dying. Haste for the doctor."

I listened for no more, but catching my breath, which had left me, as it were, in a second, I turned on my heel and ran with all my speed to Bess. Jumping upon her back, I did kick her soundly with my heels, and off we went; she making the road at a jump. I clutched the reins, and leaning far forward, urged her faster. It was a long ride to the doctor's, and I should have saved her strength, but I knew not what I was about. This refrain

kept ringing through my head: "Dorothy is dying! Dorothy is dying!"

The dull thump of my mare's hoofs upon the hard ground seemed to keep time to the doleful measure. I leaned over and whispered it to Bess, and my voice was as hoarse as though I had shouted it every rod of the mile we had covered.

"Dorothy is dying! Dorothy is dying!" And once more I kicked her flanks. I could feel her quiver at this strange treatment.

"Pardon me, good Bess, but she is ill! My sunbeam, my peach-bloom, my honey-bloom is dying!" cried I in my foolishness.

The trees, the fences, the rocks went by me in an indistinct procession, but still I urged forward my mare.

"Faster, good Bess," I whispered, "for Dorothy is dying."

I passed, in my wild ride, many of my neighbors, but to all their queries I returned but one answer as I hurried on: "Dorothy is dying."

I suppose they thought me bereft of my senses, and indeed I must have been a sorry sight, as hatless and with hair flying I hurried by in the gathering gloom on my foam-covered mare.

I ascended the long hill, passed the turnpike, and turned sharp to the left. Bess was panting grievously, and though she barely saved herself from stumbling many times I dared not let her walk, and so on we went. At last I could see, far ahead, the lights in the doctor's house, and urging forward my poor weak Bess, I hurried up the road and to the door. I waited not to knock, but staggered into the room.

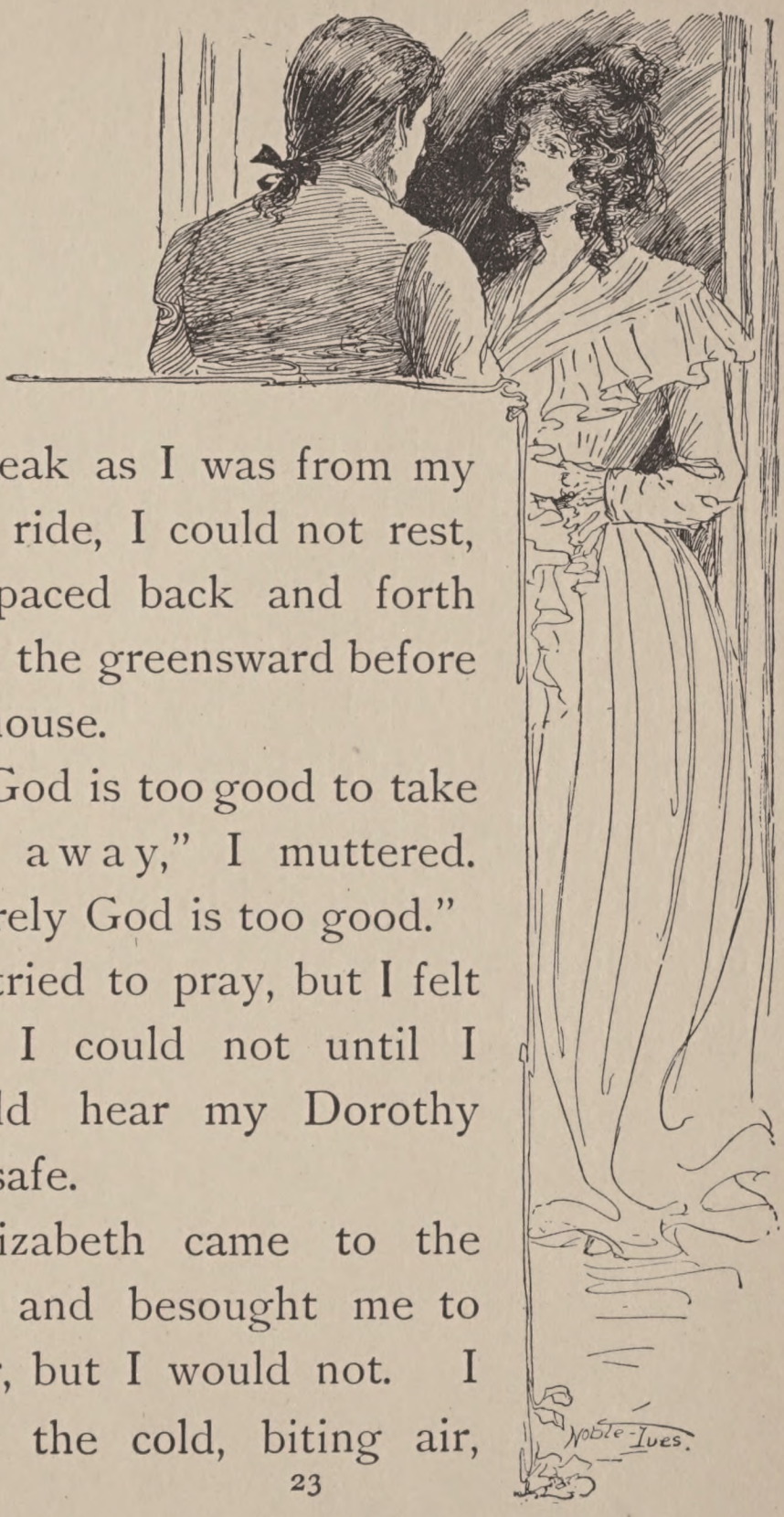
Dishevelled as I was I stood before the

doctor, who had sprung from his seat by the fire at my entrance, and said but this: "Dorothy is dying; haste!"

The good man waited for nothing more, but getting together his vials, he ordered his son to saddle his two best horses (for he guessed from my appearance that Bess could be good for little) and then, hurriedly seizing his hat, he jumped upon his horse and we were off.

Mile after mile flew by, and we spoke not; but both with heads bent low urged our horses the faster. Never so long as I live shall I forget that ride. The stars twinkled brightly overhead, the ground was hard beneath, and we saw nothing but the never-ending white line that marked the road and which swiftly crawled away beneath our eyes like a long white snake.

At last we reached the house, and I, fearing to enter, waited without for him.



Weak as I was from my long ride, I could not rest, but paced back and forth upon the greensward before the house.

"God is too good to take her away," I muttered. "Surely God is too good."

I tried to pray, but I felt that I could not until I should hear my Dorothy was safe.

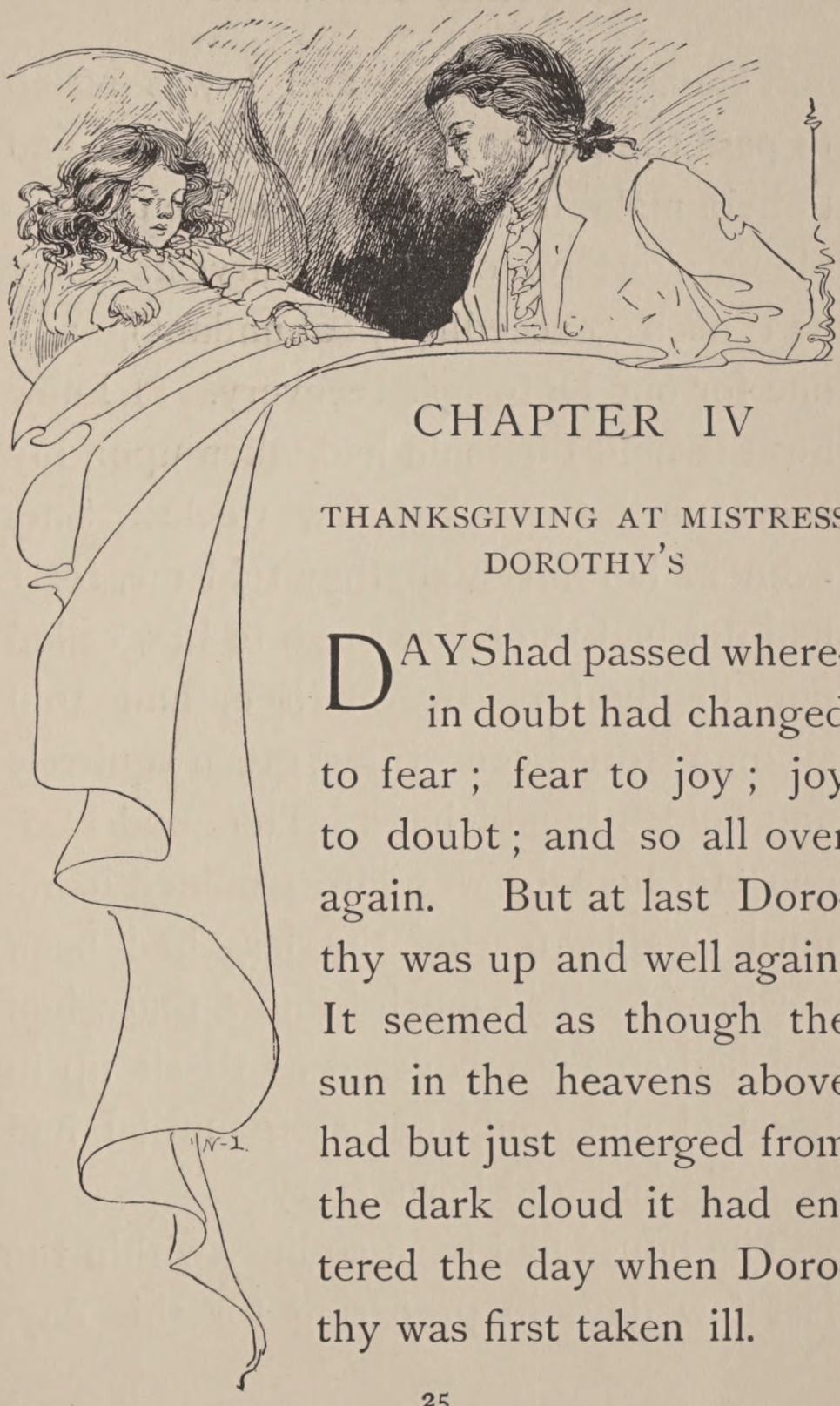
Elizabeth came to the door and besought me to enter, but I would not. I liked the cold, biting air,

and though without hat or coat felt it not.

It seemed to me, waiting out there, that days and nights passed ere the doctor came to the door. I feared to meet him, but he, seeing me, said, with tears of joy in his blessed eyes, "I hope for the best; the crisis is past."

And then, kneeling at the foot of the old elm, I prayed to my Maker, and thanked Him for His infinite goodness.

Upon rising I saw Elizabeth beside me, and she, taking my hand in hers, thanked me, and besought me to return to the house, and I did.



CHAPTER IV

THANKSGIVING AT MISTRESS DOROTHY'S

DAYS had passed wherein doubt had changed to fear; fear to joy; joy to doubt; and so all over again. But at last Dorothy was up and well again. It seemed as though the sun in the heavens above had but just emerged from the dark cloud it had entered the day when Dorothy was first taken ill.

Thanksgiving came, and I was asked to pass the day at Squire Winthrop's, and to help make it a day for a double thanksgiving; one for our good harvests (they had been exceedingly abundant), and one for our Dorothy's recovery. I knew not the hold the maid had taken upon my heart until these last few weeks. She, even in her fever, so they told me, for I had not had the heart to go to her, called out loudly for Bwuver Ben, and told strange stories concerning green squirrels and golden bumblebees. The good Deacon Hardnaught was sore troubled in regard to this, fearing the lass had been bewitched. This much I know, that when she had so far recovered as to sit up in her bed, she could not sleep until I had come in and told her a story.

The house had been so busy within the last few days in preparing for this day,

that I was almost afraid to call. If I did venture near, it was only to find Dorothy with her sleeves rolled up to her chubby elbows and her little fat hands in a basin of dough. She was very busy, these days, was my little maid, and would say to me with a wave of a flour-covered hand, "I can't bover with you, Bwuver Ben; I must finish my pie." But I, keeping very quiet, would sit near and watch her. As for Elizabeth, I hardly found the chance to say Good-day.

At last the Thanksgiving came, and at last the dinner came, and there never was in this world such a happy party as was gathered together at Squire Winthrop's. The Squire slapped me so soundly upon my back with that large, broad palm of his that my back did fairly ache. But I minded it not, and clasped that same hand and said, "Was there ever

such a happy people?" And he could reply naught, but only press my hand the harder. The good Mother Winthrop was as happy as a mortal could be, and said rather apprehensively that she feared it was "hardly righteous for mortals to be so happy, upon this earth," as she was.

And looking towards Elizabeth, who, standing just beyond with cheeks flushed with pleasure, was as sweet a sight as I ever beheld, I, half-jokingly, replied: "Right to be happy, Mistress Winthrop! As happy as we may! But is it right for one to be so divinely beautiful as Elizabeth yonder?"

And the soft, kind eyes glowed with a motherly joy as she answered, "Would, Ben, I had a son as good." And I thought she looked strangely at me.

But the prettiest, the daintiest, the happiest of them all that day was Dorothy.

She was everywhere, and wherever she appeared the cup of joy, already full, fairly brimmed over. Yea, for very joy we wept.

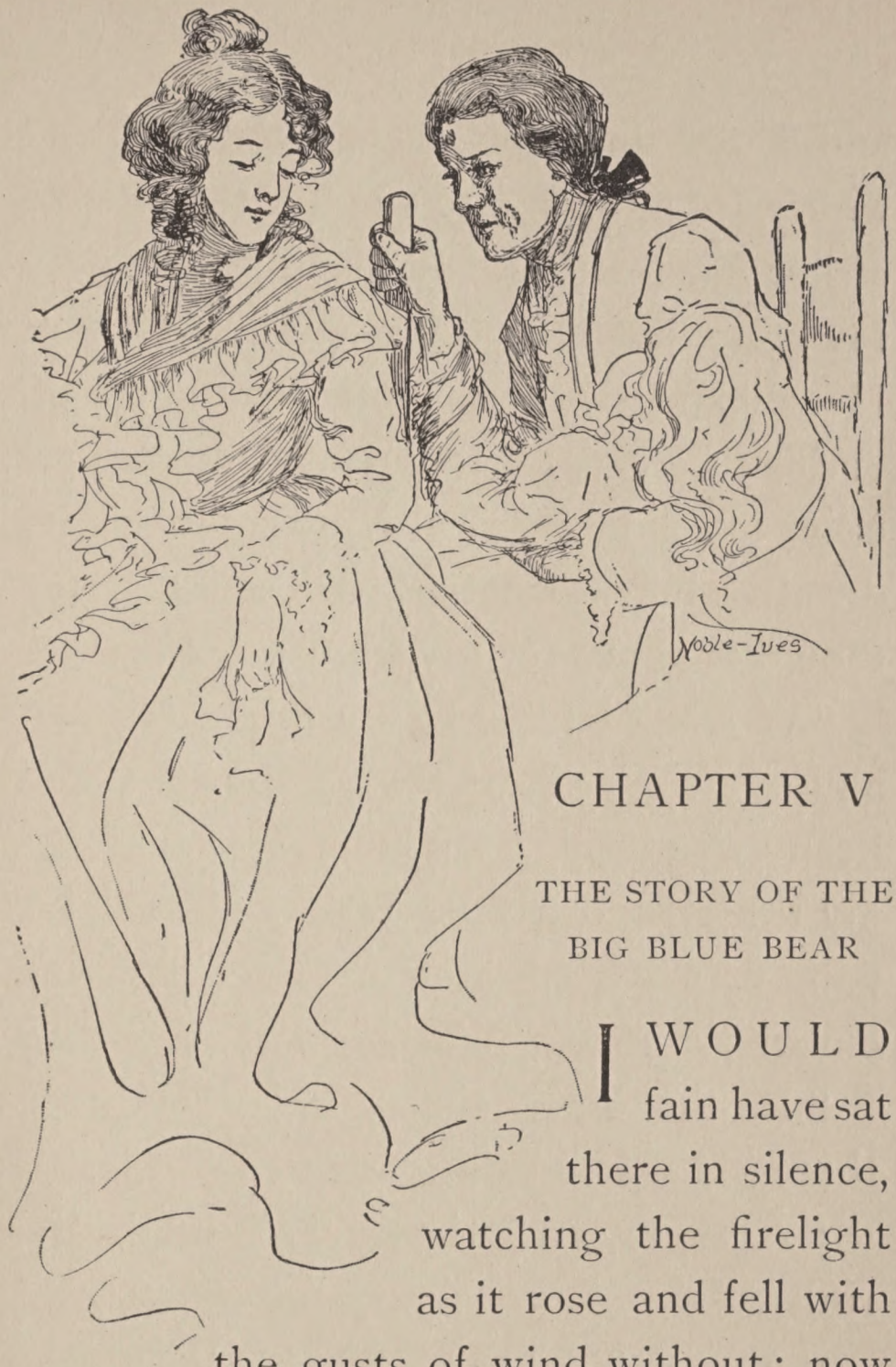
The house was crowded with guests and the day did pass only too quickly. Looking back upon it now, it seems to me to be the brightest picture of all my youthful days. I can see now each detail, from the nervous laughs and expectant silence among the younger folk just before the banquet, to the bustle and excitement and savory smells when

it was spread upon the snow-white table linen. Oh, it was a goodly sight to behold the Squire as he tucked the corner of his napkin beneath his fat, double chin!

And after all had been cleared away, and we were seated around the ample fireplace, he, and the older men, told strange stories between the puffs of their long Dutch pipes; stories of their homes in old England, and stories of weird ghost animals which at night roamed the forests far away to the West.

The day came to a close, and one by one the guests departed until I alone of all was left, and I did not count myself as a guest.

Darkness had slowly settled down upon the earth, and within the comfortable sitting-room were left only Elizabeth, Dorothy, and myself.



CHAPTER V

THE STORY OF THE BIG BLUE BEAR

I WOULD fain have sat there in silence, watching the firelight as it rose and fell with the gusts of wind without; now casting over Elizabeth's face a rosy glow,

and anon sinking to a flickering flame which did allow me to see but the outline of her fair features. It was a goodly time to dream, but Dorothy would have it not. Hardly had my thoughts begun their wanderings before I heard from the damsel upon my knee the old request. And so, drawing her close to me, I did cast my thoughts about for a yarn.

"Would," I thought, "I might tell her, and so Elizabeth, where my thoughts had been wandering." Then there entered my thick head a bold plan, and so I began, first gazing long into the glowing embers.

"In the olden times, my sweetheart, there did live—"

"A bwear,—a bwig bwear," quoth Dorothy.

"Aye, a big bear. 'T will do as well as aught else."

"Bwoo?" she asked doubtfully.

"Aye, blue. And this big blue bear was, I fear, but a surly beast, though he was thought by some to have a kindly heart."

"Thou 'st forgotten how bwig, Bwuver Ben?"

"As big as I," I replied, looking out of the corner of my eyes at Elizabeth. But I could see naught of her face, for she was shielding it with her hand as though from the heat.

"And bwoo eyes, like yours, Bwuver Ben?"

"Yes," said I, turning my eyes to the embers.

"Go on," quoth she at last, settling back, as was her wont when she had done with her foolish questions.

"This big blue bear," I went on, "lived much as other blue bears did, and though

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it is not for me to say he was better than the others, I think he was no worse; that is, until it entered his poor thick head that he would like to cross the big mountain. That was when the big blue bear came first to grief. Hardly had he crossed the top and gone a little way down the side when he came upon a little grassy dell. Here he set himself down to rest, and while resting did notice a little honey-bee fly from out the woods and into a tree beyond. Now he had learned to know that when a honey-bee entered the top of a hollow tree there was probably honey therein, and so he arose and walked to the foot of the tree, and there he found a big hole. He put his shaggy head therein, and looking up could see the finest honeycomb that he in all his life had ever seen. Glad at heart at his good fortune, he began to climb the tree. But it

was a very high tree, and he stopped to think about it, and so was lost."

I listened to see if Dorothy's breathing did smack of sleep, for now that I had started on my task I liked it not and wished I were well out of it. Listening, I could hear her faintly say, "Go on Bwuver Ben."

"If he had been the brave blue bear he thought, he would have hesitated not, but as it was he said: 'Ugh. I will go home and in the morning I will climb the tree.' And in the morning he came, but did not dare. He looked with longing upon the honey, but said he to himself, 'What if I fall!' And this it was that made him afraid. And so he waited, and waited, and waited."

Methought I heard the deep breathing now, and so I went on softly,— "And waited, and waited, and w-a-i-t-e-d —"

Dorothy was asleep, and so I stopped.

"Will thy stories never end?" quoth Elizabeth.

"I know not," I answered almost gruffly, and yet coloring to mine eyes like a naughty urchin.

For the space of a few moments naught was said, and then getting together my wits I asked: "Dost think the blue bear was a coward to wait? If he fell he lost all."

Softly as the sighing wind I heard her say, "Art sure he would have fallen?"

And then suddenly I became no longer bashful, but bending towards her I said, "Elizabeth, Elizabeth, dost love me?"

And soft and clear was her answer, "Yes, Ben."

Then Dorothy awoke and sleepily asked, — "And did the bwear get the honey, Bwuver Ben?"

"Aye, my little sweetheart, he did; and never was in all this worlds weeter honey than that same honey or happier bear than that same Big Blue Bear."

THE END.

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